

Linking Bulgarian Cities Through Computers

Blagoevgrad, Bourgas, Varna, Vidin, Gabrovo, Zlatograd, Razgrad, Rousse, Stara Zagora and Haskovo, Bulgaria

Background

Recognizing that most Bulgarian municipalities face similar problems and constraints, local officials wanted to share details about topics of mutual concern—like privatization, legislation and job listings—and access information from outside sources. They felt that learning from the experience of others would save time and resources and help prevent the repetition of costly mistakes. Data sharing was constrained by the limitations of Bulgarian telecommunications systems. The support offered by local online service providers was poor and unreliable, and many smaller cities did not have adequate telephone lines or computers.

Innovation

In March 1995 ten Bulgarian cities established an experimental Data Exchange Network (DEN) to promote cooperation among local governments and facilitate a mutual exchange of information. The pilot project connected city governments through a Bulgarian service provider, CITnet, using dedicated telephone lines for more reliable transmission. USAID financed procurement and installation of the necessary equipment, which took less than 10 days and cost about \$43,000.

In late 1995 the DEN installed a bulletin board system (BBS), a computer site where information, announcements, and inquiries can be “posted” to all network users. The BBS now includes areas for the Bulgarian Parliamentary Bulletin, a Municipality Forum, USAID Programs in Bulgaria, and the National Center for Real Properties and House Politics.

Results

The DEN was completed in May 1996, when the participating cities were connected to the server. So far user traffic has been high. The DEN will be fully connected to the Internet by the end of 1996.

Today there are 17 users connected to the DEN system: eleven cities (the ten pilot cities and Dobrich); the Foundation for Local Government Reform; three regional associations (the Association of Rhodopy Municipalities, the Association of Black Sea Municipalities, and the Association of Danube River Municipalities); the Community Development Center in Zlatograd; the Economic Development Agency in Stara Zagora; and the Youth Information Center in Gabrovo. The National Ministry of Real Property and Construction and the National Center for Real Properties and House Politics are currently being connected.

Mayors and their deputies are using the network to share their experiences and knowledge with their counterparts across the country. Members are enthusiastic about integrating the DEN into their everyday activities and are taking responsibility for its administration. The main flaws of the DEN are the weak Bulgarian telecommunications network and the lack of trained users in certain cities. National ministries are contemplating using the network to facilitate communications between national and local governments on reform issues. This innovation has not only increased access to and experience with computers and electronic telecommunication, but also has brought local governments closer together and increased the amount of information available to each city.

Summary

To promote cooperation among local governments and facilitate a mutual exchange of information, ten Bulgarian cities established a Data Exchange Network (DEN). The DEN has not only increased access to and experience with computers and electronic telecommunication, but also has brought local governments closer together and increased the amount of information available to each city.

For more Information contact:

Petya Vlakova Vassileva
Computer Expert, Haskovo
Tel. 359-382-5133
E-mail Haskovo@sf.cit.bg

Lyubomir Dimov
Director, Information
Provision, Varna
Tel. 359-5222-3486
E-mail Varna@sf.cit.bg